



A dangerous occupation



The impact of 50 years of occupation on Palestinian workers





The separation wall carves up the West Bank, annexing East Jerusalem and taking in huge swathes of the territory intended for a Palestinian state.

Introduction

The people of Palestine have lived and worked under an illegal occupation for 50 years. A 720km separation wall carves up the West Bank, annexing East Jerusalem and taking in huge swathes of the territory intended for a Palestinian state. Vast Israeli settlements and settler-only roads further divide the landscape, curtailing freedom of movement and undermining the prospects of a viable Palestinian economy.

Gaza has remained a virtual prison for the last 10 years, cut off from the rest of the world by a tight land, sea and air blockade. Israeli restrictions on imports and exports have hampered reconstruction following the last invasion in 2014 and contributed to high levels of poverty and unemployment rates of 42 per cent.

This booklet and accompanying exhibition look at the impact of 50 years of the illegal Israeli occupation on Palestinian workers. The booklet examines how restrictions imposed by the Israeli government continue to destroy homes, damage livelihoods and limit access to essential services.

The illegal occupation of Palestine is not a necessity; it is a political decision that has denied the rights of millions of people. UNISON supports the Palestinian people's right to self determination, and recognises that lasting peace depends on an end to the illegal occupation and the creation of a viable, independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Dave Prentis
General Secretary

Reconstructing Gaza



A Palestinian works in the rubble of his home to make room for a shelter for his family in a destroyed quarter of Al Tuffah, east of Gaza City, following the Israeli bombing in 2014. Rebuilding materials are scarce due to restrictions imposed by Israel.

For the last 10 years the Israeli government has imposed a tight land, sea and air blockade on the people of Gaza. It has severely restricted the passage of goods and people in and out of the area and created a virtual prison for the 1.9 million Palestinians who live there.

In 2014 Israel launched its fourth major military attack on Gaza in a decade. More than 2,000 Palestinians were killed in 50 days, including 500 children. 17,800 homes were destroyed and 80 hospitals and clinics and 250 schools were damaged or destroyed.

Reconstruction since the hostilities has been impeded by Israeli government limits on the import of building materials, including cement, into Gaza. Of the 100,000 Palestinians who had their homes destroyed or severely damaged during the 2014 hostilities, 65,000 remain displaced.

These restrictions have also delayed essential repairs to Gaza's water and sanitation system. Only 5% of Gaza's piped water supply is drinkable, and the United Nations estimate that the area will be uninhabitable by 2020.

The blockade has resulted in high levels of unemployment and poverty. In 2016 unemployment rates were 42%, amongst the highest in the world. For youth the figure is 60% and 65% for women. 47% of households in Gaza suffer from moderate or severe food insecurity.



Activestills.org Photographer: Anne Paq 26.2.2012

Gone fishing

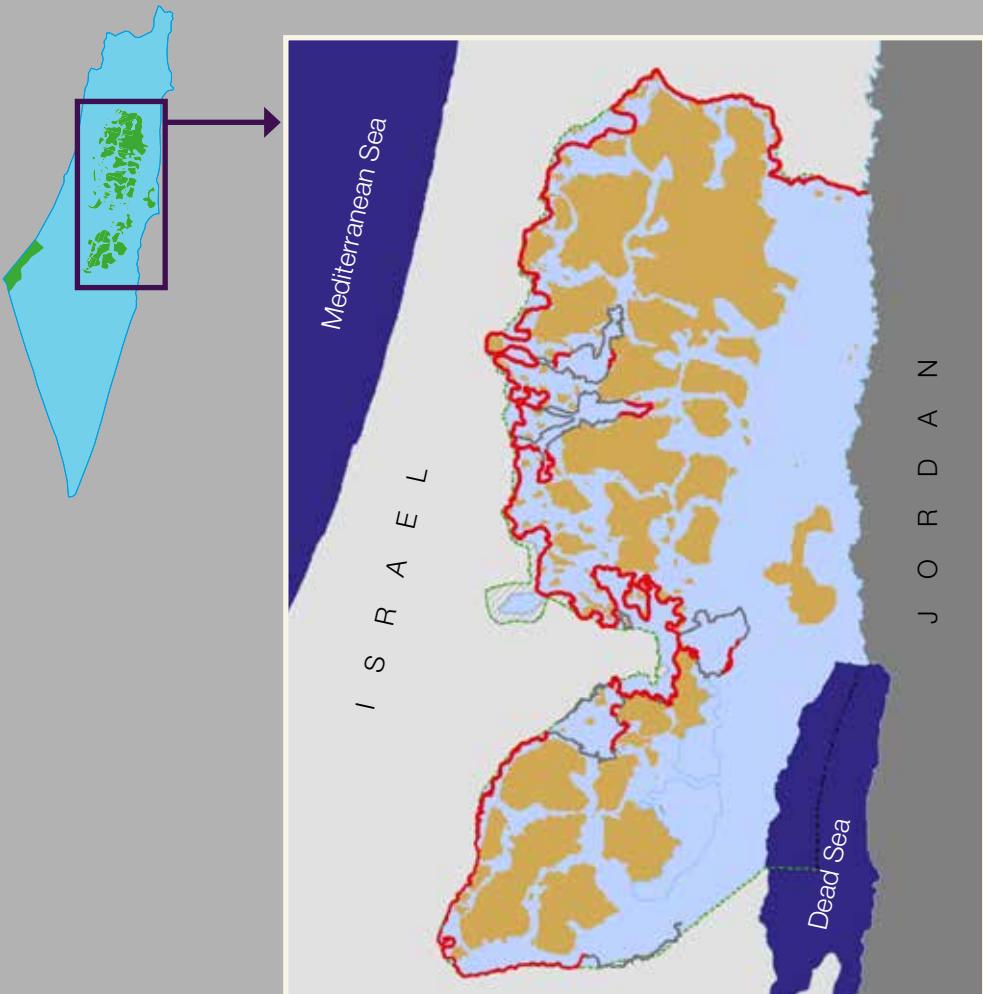
Palestinians work on the beach near the village of As Siafa, northern Gaza. The fishing industry has been devastated by the six nautical mile restriction zone imposed by the Israeli military and a shortage of materials to repair boats and equipment.

Over 35,000 Palestinians depend on Gaza's fishing industry for their livelihood, but restrictions on access to the sea, exports of fish, access to essential materials and equipment have left 95% of fishers living below the poverty line.

Fishing is restricted to a small area within six nautical miles of Gaza's coast, less than a third of the area agreed by the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the Oslo Peace Accords. The limits have resulted in over-fishing and fish stocks have declined rapidly. The fishing zone is heavily policed by the Israeli military and many have complained of arbitrary arrests and military harassment. According to Gaza's Ministry of Agriculture, in 2016 the Israeli military arrested 113 fishers, injured 10 with military fire and confiscated 46 boats.

Many fishing boats can't be used as Israel's 'dual list' restricts access to many of the materials required to repair them. 3,500 people now work in the fishing industry, down from 10,000 in 2000.

Access to agricultural land is also heavily restricted by the blockade, as access to land within 300 metres of Gaza's perimeter fence with Israel is denied, and areas several hundred metres beyond this are dangerous. Most agricultural land destroyed by hostilities in 2014 is yet to be restored.



Disappearing Palestine

Since 1967 the Israeli government has progressively colonised the West Bank. The fragmented Palestinian controlled areas A and B are isolated by the illegal settlements and a network of settler-only roads, undermining any prospects of a viable Palestinian economy.

- Areas A and B (Palestinian controlled)
- Area C (Israeli controlled)
- Separation wall
- Internationally recognised border (1967 Green Line)

The West Bank was divided into Areas A, B and C, as a temporary measure during the 1995 Oslo Accord negotiations.

The Palestinian Authority has jurisdiction over the isolated and fragmented Areas A and B, making up 38% of the land and including 80% of the Palestinian population. Israel controls the bigger, continuous Area C, consisting of 61% of the land, including the most productive farming areas of the West Bank and the settlements.

Israeli controls on the movement of Palestinians go deep into the West Bank. The system of settler-only roads; barriers around settlements; firing zones; and 543 closure obstacles and checkpoints restrict Palestinian freedom of movement. Most Palestinians are denied access to East Jerusalem, and it is increasingly difficult to travel within the West Bank, particularly from north to south.

These restrictions undermine any prospects of a viable Palestinian economy in the West Bank, and contribute to unemployment rates of 19%. They also make Palestinians highly reliant on employment in Israel and Israeli settlements, without which unemployment would rise to 35%. This forced dependence on employment in Israel and in settlements increases the vulnerability of the Palestinian economy to political shocks, for example, when Israel prevents Palestinian workers with permits entering Israel and the settlements.

Separation wall

A Palestinian worker farms his land next to the separation wall in Bethlehem. The barrier restricts Palestinian access to work, services and land, and 85% is illegal under international law.



The 320km long Green Line marks the internationally recognised border between Israel and the West Bank.

The huge separation wall by comparison is 720km long, annexing occupied East Jerusalem and taking in huge swathes of the West Bank. 85% of the wall runs inside the West Bank and has been ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice. The barrier restricts Palestinian access to work, services and land.

Most Palestinian farmers can only gain access to their land behind the barrier for a limited number of days during the harvest and ploughing season. As a result, olive trees behind the barrier yield approximately 65% less than equivalent trees in areas that can be accessed all year round.

The Palestinian olive industry is a significant contributor to the Palestinian economy, utilising almost half of the 183,000 hectares of land cultivated for agriculture by Palestinians in the West Bank. Approximately 100,000 families are reliant on the olive industry, and the sector employs large numbers of unskilled labourers and approximately 15% of working women.

The industry is being further undermined by settler violence. In 2015 11,254 olive trees were destroyed by settler violence, although this has dropped significantly to 1,553 in 2016.

Access to healthcare

A Palestinian woman is carried to an ambulance at Qalandiya checkpoint, outside East Jerusalem. Palestinian emergency patients suffer long delays as they are transferred between ambulances at checkpoints into East Jerusalem.



Activestills.org Photographer: Anne Paq 29.8.2009

Access to healthcare is extremely limited for Palestinians in the West Bank and particularly Gaza, with most specialist treatment only available in six Palestinian hospitals in occupied East Jerusalem.

In all but a few cases Palestinian-registered ambulances are prevented from entering occupied East Jerusalem. Instead the Israeli authorities require a ‘back-to back’ transfer, during which Israeli soldiers conduct a search of the Palestinian-registered ambulance, before the patient is transferred to an East Jerusalem-registered ambulance to continue their journey. A study conducted by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in 2016 found that 41% of back-to-back emergency transfers are delayed at checkpoints for more than 15 minutes, and the average delay in emergencies is 24 minutes.

Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza who need treatment in East Jerusalem are required to submit medical documentation and apply for an exit permit from the Israeli authorities at least 10 days before their appointment. If approved, patients are informed the night before they travel. Many are delayed by security interviews, resulting in missed appointments. This places an enormous burden on patients, health workers and hospitals. In 2016 only 64% of permits were approved for patients needing care outside Gaza.



Going to work

Thousands of Palestinian workers endure long waits and humiliating treatment as they queue in 'the cage' from 3am each morning at the Bethlehem checkpoint to get to their work in Israel.

Approximately 52,000 Palestinians have permits to work in Israel. They are forced to endure long queues and humiliating treatment at checkpoints from the early hours of the morning in order to access work.

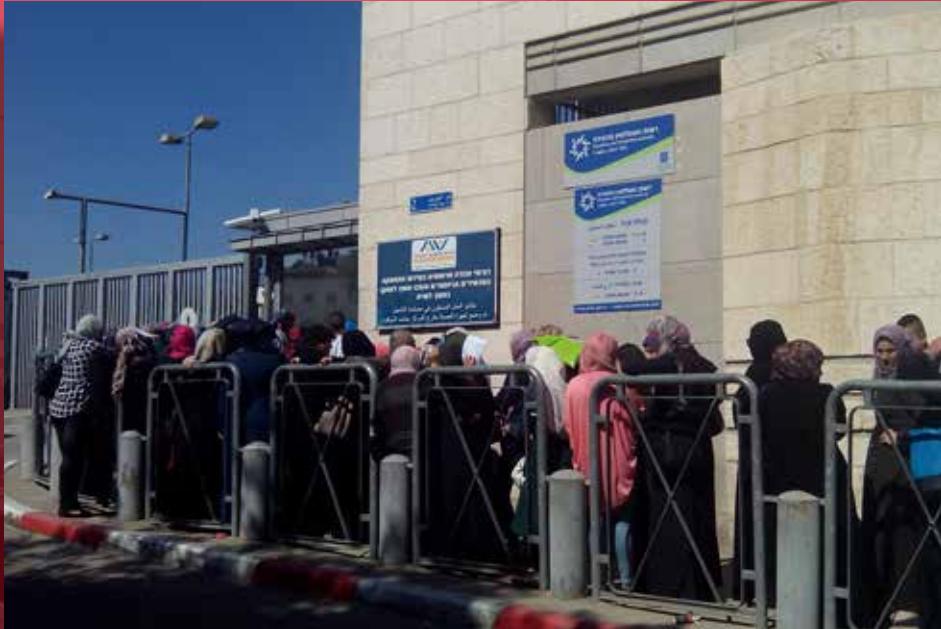
Many queue from as early as 3am at one of 26 checkpoints between the West Bank and Israel, and crossing can take up to three hours. Most are employed in the construction industry, and rely on labour brokers who take a significant proportion of their pay, sometimes up to 40%. Workers should be protected by Israeli labour law and receive the minimum wage, but rarely do. Many complain they have to pay fees to the Israeli trade union, Histadrut, and claim they don't receive representation and health insurance.

A further 30,000 Palestinians take enormous risks to seek work in Israel without the correct documentation, either climbing the wall or hiding in vehicles. Those who get work in this way receive lower pay and harsher conditions. In 2016 the Israeli authorities launched a crackdown on 'undocumented' workers, including mass arrests and tougher penalties for employers.

Women's rights in East Jerusalem

Palestinian women queue at the Employment Bureau in East Jerusalem.

Palestinian residents from East Jerusalem should be able to access employment and income support but are often refused by the authorities. With UNISON's support WAC-MAAN is enabling women to organise and demand their right to work and social protection.



WAC MAAN

The vast separation wall cuts off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and illegally annexes the city to Israel. It also separates tens of thousands of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem from the urban centre, forcing them to crowd at checkpoints to access work, education and healthcare.

Unemployment rates for Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem are extremely high, particularly for women, contributing to 76% of the population living below the poverty line.

Palestinians should be entitled to income support from the National Insurance Agency, and help to find work from the Employment Bureau but they often endure humiliation and rejection when they present their claim to the authorities. Documents are often declined or misplaced, applications refused on spurious grounds and applicants are referred to fictitious jobs.

UNISON is supporting the Workers' Advice Centre, WAC-MAAN, to organise Palestinian women in East Jerusalem who are seeking employment and income support. Trained activists ensure that women understand their rights and represent them when they face discrimination.

After initial threats and resistance, the pressure is now making a real difference. More claims are being processed successfully, registration machines have been repaired and a shade has been installed at the Employment Bureau to protect queuing women from the sun.

Settlement cities

Vast settlements like Modi'in Illit dominate many parts of the West Bank. Palestinian workers in the settlements should be employed under Israeli labour law, but thousands endure poor conditions and are paid less than the minimum wage.



Israeli settlements dominate many parts of the West Bank, particularly the area described as ‘Greater Jerusalem’, the Jordan Valley and areas close to Tel Aviv. Expansion is rapid, with 1,800 new settlement units begun in 2015 alone.

In February 2017 the Israeli government announced steps to authorise the building of 4,000 new homes for settlers in the West Bank, and to lift restrictions on settlements in East Jerusalem against international law.

There are now approximately 150 official settlements and 150 unauthorised outposts, although these are provided with security, power, water and roads by the Israeli government. Many are being established on hilltops stretching from the west to the east, gradually creating an additional barrier between the north and south of the West Bank.

Approximately 26,000 Palestinians work on the illegal Israeli settlements inside the West Bank. Although Israeli labour law should apply, it is rarely implemented. Many Israeli employers instead apply defunct 1967 Jordanian law, despite the Israeli court ruling in 2007 that this was illegal. Most are employed in constructing the vast settlements that now dominate the West Bank, while others work in agriculture, the industrial zones and tourist areas. The number of work permits provided by the Israeli government to work in Israel or the settlements fluctuates regularly.



Fruits of the occupation

The fertile Jordan Valley is dominated by large settlement farms, able to produce fruit and vegetables all year round. Palestinian agricultural workers are exploited by farm owners and labour brokers, with low pay and poor conditions in breach of Israeli law.

The Jordan Valley is a narrow, fertile strip of land running alongside the River Jordan. Because of its potential to produce fruit and vegetables all year round, what was Palestinian farmland is now exploited by large agricultural settlements, exporting a huge range of agricultural products.

To keep their profits high and avoid any responsibility for their workers, these Israeli farms rely on labour brokers for a plentiful supply of cheap Palestinian labour. Pay is below the minimum wage, and the holiday, sickness and other benefits workers are entitled to under Israeli law are denied.

Many workers endure long days on tree-top platforms, picking dates in the baking heat. They take home as little as £14 a day, once the labour brokers have taken their cut. Serious injuries are common but instead of paying for treatment, injured workers are often dumped at checkpoints or outside Palestinian hospitals, and expected to pay their own costs.

UNISON's International Development Fund has supported Kav LaOved, (the Workers' Hotline), to organise Palestinian workers on settlement farms. Working with the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions they train workers on their rights and take up legal cases for the Israeli minimum wage and hospital costs. UNISON has also supported Palestinian farmers to sell Fairtrade dates in the UK, working in Partnership with Zaytoun.

Demolishing homes



Activestills.org Photographer: Martin Barzilai 9.8.2016

A Palestinian family home that was donated by the European Union, after its demolition by Israeli authorities, in the village of Umm al-Kheir, South Hebron Hills. 1,093 Palestinian homes and structures were demolished or seized in 2016 leaving hundreds of families homeless; destroying their livelihoods.

The destruction of Palestinian homes is a regular occurrence in the West Bank, with 1,093 Palestinian homes and structures demolished or seized in 2016 alone, leaving hundreds of families homeless and destroying their livelihoods.

When homes or shelters are rebuilt, these are also destroyed. Almost 30% of demolitions in 2016 were of homes and structures provided by donor agencies, including the European Union.

The pace of demolitions has increased in 2017, with 140 structures destroyed by the Israeli authorities in January alone. There are now over 12,500 outstanding demolition orders against Palestinian-owned structures in Israeli controlled Area C.

Most homes are demolished due to the lack of a building permit, something that is almost impossible for a Palestinian to obtain. In contrast, authorisation is regularly provided retrospectively to illegal Israeli outposts.

The village of Umm Al Khair in the South Hebron Hills has existed since 1948 when Palestinian refugees bought the land. In recent years it has been subjected to numerous demolitions due to its proximity to the neighbouring settlement of Carmel, which was built in 1981. In 2016 Israeli armed forces returned to the village on three separate occasions to demolish a total of 15 homes and structures, including a community centre and three EU-funded emergency shelters.



WAC-MAAN

Fighting for workers' rights

UNISON's International Development Fund has supported the trade union WAC-MAAN to organise Palestinian workers in the Israeli-run industrial zones in the West Bank. In February 2017 workers at the Zarfati Garage in Mishor Adumim won a four-year battle for trade union recognition.

Mishor Adumim is one of 14 illegal industrial zones established by Israel in the West Bank. While most industrial zones are under-utilised, they allow the authorities to claim large areas of land, build Israel's economic presence in the West Bank and exploit cheap Palestinian labour.

Most Palestinians do not want to work in the industrial zones but have little choice as the occupation means a viable Palestinian economy is virtually impossible. As such they endure low pay, long hours and precarious work in poor conditions.

The Zarfati garage is one of 300 businesses in the Mishor Adumim Industrial Zone. When workers attempted to organise for better pay and conditions and gain recognition for their union WAC-MAAN, the garage owner responded by dismissing the head of the workers' committee, Hatem Abu Ziade for 'security reasons'.

The workers and WAC-MAAN responded by taking strike action. With the support of the UNISON International Development Fund, they successfully fought a lengthy battle in both the regional and national labour courts. Hatem returned to work in May 2016 and 10 months later the Zarfati garage made history when it reluctantly signed the first-ever collective agreement for Palestinian workers in the West Bank industrial zones.

Taking action for Palestinian workers' rights

The struggle for Palestinian freedom and rights is driven by its people but international solidarity and pressure are essential to ensure that justice prevails. UNISON has long campaigned for the rights of the Palestinian people, and works with trade unions, labour organisations and human rights groups to demand an end to the illegal occupation.

UNISON's International Development Fund has helped establish projects that support Palestinian workers.

UNISON has supported workers in agriculture and industry, carers and cleaners to organise. We have supported the training of future trade union leaders, and helped Palestinian workers campaign for new laws to protect their rights.

Take action

- Make sure your branch is affiliated to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.
- Support actions commemorating the 50th anniversary of the occupation and 10 years of the blockade of Gaza.
- Ask your MP to call on the UK government to support an end to the occupation and the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian state.
- Buy Fairtrade Palestinian products from Zaytoun and other organisations working to support Palestinian producers.
- Don't buy from companies involved in the occupation of Palestine or the denial of Palestinian human rights.
- Make sure your pension fund is not investing in companies that benefit from the occupation.
- Support the No to Pinkwashing Campaign, challenging the Israeli government's use of LGBT tourism to divert attention from human rights crimes against Palestinians.
- Speak to your UNISON branch international officer to find out more.
- The 'dangerous occupation' booklet and exhibition is available to download at:
www.unison.org.uk/international



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